



Press Release:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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James Joins Booker and Pledges City Assistance to Correct Problems at Beleaguered Housing Complex

Mayor Sharpe James joined Central Ward Councilman Cory Booker at the Garden Spires housing complex on First Street today to announce the city's plans to build a playground and beef up security at the beleaguered property.

Booker, several members of his staff and local residents have been living in a tent on the property's parking lot for the last ten days to draw attention to the drug and other urban ills that plague the complex.

While praising the councilman's efforts to draw attention to problems at the two-building, 550-unit site, the Mayor affirmed that the city would build a playground on city-owned land adjacent to the site, provide a mobile police command post on the property and petition the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to give the buildings' new management an emergency grant to hire additional security guards. Nearly 60 percent of the property's tenants receive Section 8 subsidies.

"HUD must not use poverty as the only criterion for rental subsidies, but should demand as a prerequisite that tenants are also drug and crime free," James stated.

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James/Booker ad 1

"Garden Spires is a private property, and before we could send police officers onto the site, we had to have a letter of request and approval from the building's management. We now have that approval and are moving immediately to put police officers on the premises," he said.

James pointed out, "In the past, we moved police officers into 2 Custer Avenue, 719-725 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and 440 Washington Street. At the King Boulevard site, Newark police officers were partnered with 15 state troopers. We were successful in reducing drugs at all three properties, and today a rehabilitated 2 Custer Avenue is a model building.

The Mayor announced that "Newark's finest" would partner with the buildings' owners in a Partners In Crime, or PAC program to abolish drug trafficking and other criminal activities at the complex. He explained that community service officers would go door to door throughout the 20-story property to solicit tenants' help in curtailing drugs and in catching the dealers.

"We will work with the buildings' security personnel and coordinate our efforts with other city agencies to once and for all halt illegal activities at Garden Spires," the Mayor stated.

Police Director Joseph Santiago said his officers would work closely with the buildings' security force and establish a mobile command center at the site. "We plan to tackle the problems at Garden Spires much the same way we successfully moved into troublesome apartment buildings in the East, Central and South Wards. Each site was occupied for about six months, and we were very successful in ridding the area of narcotics and other criminal activities."

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James/Booker ad 2

Personnel from the department will solicit participation from complex residents for the Police Citizens Academy, P.A.L. and D.A.R.E. recruitment, and to establish a block/building watch, the director said.

Fire, code enforcement and health inspectors will work with the Police Department to conduct systematic inspections to insure that elevators are working and health and safety issues are properly addressed, he noted.

In setting up a temporary residence at Garden Spires, Booker explained that he wanted to draw attention to problems at the Central Ward complex, "to help stabilize the site by bringing in positive resources and activities and to give some semblance of hope to the many law abiding families living there that their elected officials are committed to effecting real changes and improving their quality of life."

Booker said he was overwhelmed by "the outpouring of support from all over the City, county, state and even out of state.

"People recognize that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. I am overjoyed that all the pieces have come together. The tenants and the buildings' owner have come forward and will play an active role in transforming the property.

The City is united, and we have a chance now to take two buildings in distrust for over a decade and to turn them into a healthy living environment," he declared.

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James/Booker ad 3

The experience of the past 10 days has underscored the fact "that good tenants and residents of Newark outnumber the bad element by 1000 to one," the councilman said. "What we have learned from this experience is that it's not the bad people or words that hurt us, but the silence of good people.

"By bringing attention to the problems in a secure environment (the tent)," Booker said, "good people are now standing up and speaking up, and they have been given the assurance that if they continue to do so, they will get support."

Erected around 1967, the twin, 20 story Garden Spires was built on the site of Newark Academy, an all-male prep school that moved to Livingston and has since become co-ed. The complex was originally known as Academy Spires and was built as middle income housing that gave priority to families displaced by urban clearance in other parts of the city. Over the last 30 years, it has changed ownership several times, including a brief period when an attempt was made to turn the units into cooperatives.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development took over the building in 1979 and operated it for four years until Academy Spires Ltd. acquired it in 1983. The property was purchased again in 1987 by Garden Spires Associates, Ltd. of New York, which changed its name. This past May, Michael Puderbeutel of Brooklyn purchased the property under the name of Garden Spires, LLC for \$1.4 million.

The new owner, who owns and manages other low-income properties throughout New York State, said he was "100 percent committed" to upgrading and maintaining Garden Spires.

"We are totally aware of the buildings' needs and with the cooperation of the City, the issue of security straightened out and the confidence of the tenants, we are prepared to turn the complex around," said Puderbeutel.